

Background information:

Northern STI Facts

1. Gonorrhea in the NWT:
 - NWT has highest rate of gonorrhea in Canada.
2. Chlamydia in the NWT:
 - NWT has second highest rate of Chlamydia in Canada.
3. Symptoms:
 - STI's can spread quickly because infected men and women may not have any symptoms. Therefore, people don't know they have an STI.
4. Infertility, tubal pregnancy, and premature birth:
 - If you get an STI and do not get treated, you may have problems getting pregnant later in your life. You could also have a higher risk of a tubal pregnancy or giving birth too early.
5. Sexually Transmitted Infections:
 - Chlamydia, gonorrhea, trichomonas, pubic lice, genital herpes, genital warts, hepatitis B, syphilis, and HIV infection are STIs.
6. Common STIs:
 - Chlamydia and Gonorrhea are the most common STIs in Canada and the NWT.
7. Spreading STIs:
 - Sexually transmitted infections or STIs are mainly spread through unprotected oral, vaginal or anal sex (sex in the bum).
8. STIs in the NWT:
 - The rates for gonorrhea and Chlamydia in the NWT are 9-15 times higher than those for Canada.
9. HIV weakens & destroys the immune system:
 - This means it cannot fight against invading germs, causing the body to get infections more easily.
10. At-risk for Chlamydia and gonorrhea?
 - Anyone that has unprotected sex, but most common in people between the ages of 15- 29.
11. Hepatitis C:
 - It is mainly spread through blood (for example sharing needles or works)

12. Hepatitis B fact:

- Hepatitis B can be prevented with a vaccination.

13. Gonorrhea term:

- Gonorrhea is also called “the clap” or “the dose”.

14. HPV and cancer:

- Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) is the virus that causes genital warts. HPV is the major cause of cancer of the cervix.

15. Hepatitis C in Canada:

- Hepatitis C is a liver disease affecting more than 5,000 Canadians (including young adults) each year.

Symptoms of STIs

1. Discharge:

- Unusual or heavy discharge from the vagina or penis.

2. Burning:

- Burning when peeing.

3. Blisters:

- Painful blisters and sores in the genital area (“private parts”).

4. Itchiness:

- Irritation or itchiness around the genitals (“private parts”) or anus.

5. Rash:

- Total body rash or itchiness.

6. Swelling:

- Swollen glands in the neck or groin.

7. Bumps:

- Bumps in the genital area.

8. Bleeding:

- Bleeding or spotting between periods.

9. Painful sex:

- Pain during sex.

10. Painful belly:

- Pain in the lower belly

11. Painful testicles:

- Pain or swelling in the testicles (“balls”)

12. Infertility:

- Not being able to get pregnant or make a woman pregnant.

13. Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID):

- A serious infection of a woman’s reproductive system (fallopian tubes, uterus, cervix, ovaries) that causes long-term pain in the abdomen (belly), tubal pregnancy or infertility (being unable to have a baby). PID can happen if a person doesn’t get treated for an STI.

14. STI symptoms after oral sex:

- Swollen lymph glands in your neck, sore throat, or sores around your mouth are possible symptoms of having an STI from oral sex.

15. Sores on penis or vulva (“private parts”):

- This can be sign of syphilis or herpes.

Risks for Spreading STIs

1. Unprotected sex:

- Unprotected oral, vaginal or anal sex with someone who is infected with an STI.

2. Unknown partner:

- You are having sex with a new partner.

3. Infected current partner:

- Your current partner has an STI and may not know it.

4. More than one partner:

- You (or your partner) have sex with other people.

5. Alcohol:

- Consuming alcohol may lower your ability to make smart decisions about sexual safety. People often put themselves at risk for contracting an STI while their judgment is impaired by alcohol.

6. Unsafe practices:

- You (or your partner) share needles or sex toys (for example, “dildo”).

7. Skin to skin contact:

- Skin-to-skin contact can spread infections like genital herpes, genital warts and pubic lice.

8. During Pregnancy:
 - A woman who is pregnant and infected can pass an STI to her baby during pregnancy or birth.
9. During Breastfeeding:
 - The HIV virus can be passed to a baby through the mother's breast milk.
10. Blood to blood contact:
 - HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and syphilis are spread by coming into contact with infected blood.
11. More than one infection at a time.
 - You can have more than one STI at one time! You can also become infected with an STI more than once.
12. Violence:
 - An on-going problem in many NWT communities is violence, abuse and forced sex. STI's can be transmitted through these acts of violence.
13. Oral sex:
 - Oral sex is normally a low risk activity for spreading STIs. However, it is possible, especially if there is blood in the saliva or a cold sore on the mouth.
14. Tattoos and Piercings:
 - Make sure the equipment used is sterile.
15. Drug use:
 - Getting high may lower your ability to make smart choices about having safe sex or sharing needles. You have a bigger chance of being careless if you are high. It is possible to acquire an STI while high by sharing a contaminated needle... A good idea to get tested regularly.

Prevention

1. Abstinence:
 - Not having sex (intercourse).
2. Choices:
 - Instead of intercourse practice other close activities, like kissing, hugging or touching.
3. Condoms:
 - Use a condom every time you have sex.
4. Reduce your sexual partners:
 - Having more than one partner increases your chance of getting an STI.

5. Birth Control Pills:
 - Birth control pills prevent pregnancy, not STIs. Condoms reduce your chance of getting an STI.
6. Anal Sex:
 - Unprotected anal sex can cause tears in the skin, increasing your chances of getting an STI.
7. Don't share needles!
 - Never share needles or drug-related equipment.
8. One partner:
 - Have sex with only one partner who has been tested, or practice safer sex with all partners.
9. Check-ups:
 - Have regular check-ups and testing STIs.
10. Barrier for oral sex:
 - Cut a non-lubricated condom at both ends and down the middle. Spread over the area of contact.
11. Safer sex:
 - Don't let your partner talk you into you to not using a condom. Insist on using one.
12. STI testing in a relationship:
 - Talk to your partner about getting tested for STIs before having sex.
13. Sex toys:
 - Put non-lubricated condoms on dildos. Wash sex toys with warm water and soap after every use.
14. Masturbation:
 - Masturbation alone or with a partner is safe as long as you avoid contact with sperm, ejaculate, vaginal fluid or blood.
15. Tattoos and piercings:
 - Make sure the environment is clean. The artist should wear gloves and use tools that come straight out of a new, sterile, unopened package.

Misconceptions

1. Hugging or kissing:
 - HIV/AIDS is not spread by hugging or kissing.

2. Sharing food:
 - HIV/AIDS is not spread by sharing food.
3. Toilet seats:
 - HIV/AIDS is not spread by using the same toilet.
4. Infected coworker or friend:
 - HIV/AIDS is not spread by working or going to school with someone who has HIV.
5. Insect bites:
 - HIV/AIDS is not spread by insect bites.
6. Anyone can get an STI:
 - Children, women and men can become infected with an STI. If a person practices unsafe sex and sharing needles, s/he can become infected.
7. Healthy teenagers think nothing can happen to them:
 - “I am a healthy teenager. I won’t get an STI from sex. It just won’t happen to me”, but STI rates are highest in youth between 15 and 29 years of age.
8. Drinking and unsafe sex:
 - “We always seem to have sex after a night of drinking or smoking pot. Sometimes I’m so out of it I forget to use a condom”. Using alcohol and drugs affects your ability to make healthy choices. You may do something that you would never do sober.
9. You can’t get an STI the first time you have sex:
 - “I won’t get an STI the first time I have sex or if the guy doesn’t come in me”. You can catch an STI from having sex, or even from having genital contact with someone who is infected. Make sure you use a condom or latex barrier for any sexual activity to prevent exposure to infected blood, semen or vaginal discharge.
10. STIs always have symptoms:
 - “I don’t have an STI. If I did I would know it”. 50% of males and 70% of women do not show any symptoms of an STI.
11. Oral sex is always safe:
 - STIs like genital warts, gonorrhea, hepatitis B, HIV and genital herpes can all be passed on by unprotected oral sex.
12. Washing is prevention:
 - STIs cannot be prevented by washing your genitals after sex.

13. Urinating will prevent an STI:

- STI's cannot be prevented by peeing after sex.

14. Condoms prevent all STIs:

- Condoms will not always prevent against all STI's. It depends on where the sores are. Condoms will not prevent STIs like genital herpes, genital warts or pubic lice.

15. Use condoms properly:

- Not knowing how to use a condom properly or not having enough experience with a condom are the most common reasons why condoms fail. Condoms fail because of human error.